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**“SIE SAGEN SKÅL UND HERRE GUD UND ARRIVEDERCI”:
ON THE MULTILINGUAL CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN
ELLEN THESLEFF AND GORDON CRAIG**

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ABSTRACT

The Finnish painter Ellen Thesleff (1869–1954) is one of the most famous female painters in Scandinavian art history. During her stay in Florence, Italy, at the beginning of the twentieth century, she became acquainted with the British theater personality and artist (Edward) Gordon Craig (1872–1966). Their correspondence from the first half of the century is a part of European cultural history and art criticism; they write, among other things, about painting and graphics, literature and theater. Of linguistic importance is that the original letters preserved for posterity contain traces of many European languages: not only German, which is a central language in the correspondence, but also French, Italian, and English.

The focus of this paper is the coexistence of languages in the multilingual correspondence—about 200 dated and 60 undated letters—kept at the National Library of France in Paris. In this paper, microfilms are used instead of the original material, and the selection of letters is limited to twenty-five. The particular interest lies in Ellen Thesleff as a multiliterate, writing individual, and her choices of and switches between different languages. My study shows that Thesleff used a variety of languages when writing letters. This can, for example, be seen from the perspective of the personal nature and the communicative function of the personal letters, where the “self” of the writer is present. In a way, multilingualism has among other things an emotional function for her: one could, for instance, argue that it was used as a kind of “secret writing” or language play between Thesleff and Craig.

Keywords: multilingual correspondence, code-switching, Ellen Thesleff, Gordon Craig

TOWARD THE LINGUISTIC PROFILE OF A EUROPEAN ARTIST AND POLYGLOT

Apollogatan 13[.] oder nicht. ich sitze Dear You am Meeres strand bei wasser
und stein zu kommen in contact mit sie. [. . .]¹
– Ellen Thesleff to Gordon Craig in an undated letter

This paper is about multilingual resources and practices in a Finnish–British artist correspondence. The main focus is on personal letters written by a Swedish-speaking Finnish female artist during the first half of the twentieth century to a contemporary colleague on the European continent (thus “correspondence” here means only letters from Ellen Thesleff to Gordon Craig but not Craig’s letters to Thesleff).² In this connection, it is possible to discuss only Ellen Thesleff as a polyglot and a user of multilingual resources while interpretations about the linguistic repertoire of Gordon Craig have to rely on secondary sources.

The sender of the letters, Ellen Thesleff, was a Finnish painter and graphic artist, born in Helsinki in 1869 into a bourgeois Swedish-speaking family. She is one of the most famous female painters in the Nordic countries (for the life and art of Thesleff, see Bäcksbäck 1955; Pettersson 1955; Lahti 1976; Ahtola-Moorhouse 1998; Sarajas-Korte 1998; Schalin 2004; Sinisalo 2007). Like many other artists before and after her, she made a Grand Tour—or, rather, many Grand Tours—to the European continent, mainly to Italy and France. Over the years, she stayed and worked abroad on several occasions, first and foremost in Florence. Her stays on the Continent gave her a good picture of artistic life at the time. During her stay in Florence in the early 1900s, Thesleff became acquainted with Gordon Craig, the addressee of the letters. Getting to know Craig, a pioneer of modern theater, was a great experience for Thesleff artistically. Craig inspired her, among other things, to make wood engravings and woodcuts and to publish them in his journal *The Mask*. It has been said that their relationship stirred up her creativity and became a friendship that lasted until the end of life. It has also been pointed out that Craig was Thesleff’s

1 Translation: “Apollonkatu 13[.] Or not. I am sitting, Dear You, at the seaside by water and stones, in order to come into contact with you.” The quotation is mostly in German but includes a couple of switches into English, too. The name of the street, *Apollogatan/Apollonkatu*, is given in Swedish, which is expected considering Thesleff’s first language.

2 Personal letters are so-called *ego-documents*. According to Fulbrook and Rublack (2010, 263), an ego-document is “a source or ‘document’—understood in the widest sense—providing an account of, or revealing privileged information about, the ‘self’ who produced it” (for the concept of *ego-document*, see also von Greyerz 2010).

muse. Thesleff had also a gift for languages; she was a writer, who expressed her thoughts, for example, in poetry (Sinisalo 2007).



Figure 1 (left): Ellen Thesleff in Murole in 1910. (The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Helsinki). Figure 2 (right): Gordon Craig in Florence in 1908. (The Society of Swedish Literature in Finland, Helsinki).

ELLEN THESLEFF AND GORDON CRAIG

Thesleff was in a number of ways an exceptional phenomenon in Finnish art history. She started her career as a painter in the 1880s and made her first trip to Italy in the 1890s. Craig, on the other hand, was an actor, director, theater and art theorist, graphic artist, and bohemian. Thesleff was one of his closest friends and colleagues. Craig called Thesleff the most intelligent woman he had ever met. However, in the biography of Craig written by his son Edward Craig in 1968, Thesleff is mentioned only once: she is called “a promising young artist” (1968, 232).

Thesleff and Craig became good friends and started writing letters to each other. Their correspondence, comprising both letters and postcards, covers the period from the early years of the twentieth century to the 1950s. However, the letters from Craig to Thesleff were destroyed by Thesleff herself. What in the first place caused Thesleff to destroy the letters has raised many questions concerning the nature of their relationship (see, e.g., Lahti 1976). For example, Thesleff does

not write much about Craig in her letters to Finland. Also, her letters to Craig in Florence in the 1910s were destroyed during the war (Lahti 1976, 52).

Still, most of the letters from Thesleff to Craig have been preserved, and it goes without saying that the cultural-historical value of the correspondence is great. Linguistically, the correspondence is highly multilingual and therefore fruitful, for example, as a data source for historical sociolinguistics (for historical sociolinguistics, see Hernández-Campoy and Conde-Silvestre 2012). As stated above, the original letters from Thesleff to Craig are written in many languages: German, French, Italian, and English, among others. However, the “main language” of the letters—the dominating language of each language-use situation—is often German. According to Patrick Le Boeuf at the National Library of France, most of the letters are in German (email, 27 November 2006; for a discussion on the matrix vs. embedded language, see Kalliokoski 2009, 14).

It is not at all surprising that the first letter from Thesleff to Craig is written in French, the *lingua franca* of art in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The formality of the letter, which—like many of the letters in the Edward Gordon Craig collection at the National Library of France—is inadequately dated, is different from other letters; it is signed “Ellen Thesleff” and not, for example, “Ellen.” In the first letter, she does not yet make use of her command of other European languages, which is to be expected as mixing languages tends to be an ingroup phenomenon among people familiar with one another (see, e.g., Gumperz 1982). Later on, however, Thesleff often resorts to linguistic elements written in foreign languages. Based on these later letters, it can be hypothesized that in their face-to-face interaction Thesleff and Craig also used different languages; the letters—at least theoretically—contain more or less spontaneous switches between languages probably in the “same” way as their real-life communication. The use of many languages thus contributes considerably to the textual dynamics of the correspondence.

In fact, the multilingual nature of the letters is not unexpected. It may be assumed that both Thesleff and Craig were polyglots, i.e., multiliterate individuals of their own time. They were both persons with social backgrounds that gave them opportunities to travel, read, and learn languages. However, direct references to their language skills and education are not frequent either in the letters or in the existing biographical literature (for Thesleff’s education and studies in Finland and abroad, see Schalin 2004, 44–51). Of Craig’s language skills and studies abroad we know, for example, that it was thought “expedient to send him abroad, this time to an English school run by a mixture of English and German mast[er]s in Heidelberg” and

that at home his mother arranged for him to have French lessons (Craig 1968, 60, 69). In a letter in 1901, Craig (1968, 138) writes to a friend: “Mon cher Martin—I write in or rather outside a café. . . . Fine place France—Fine people the French—can’t speak a word of English. . . .”

The Thesleff family spoke Swedish among themselves, and Craig appreciated the family very much. According to him, they were “a lovely family from Finland” and “the only nice people left in Florence” (Craig 1968, 228, 297). At the beginning of the 1870s, Ellen Thesleff’s father got a job as a leading engineer in the town of Kuopio in eastern Finland, so Finnish-speaking inland Finland was familiar to her from childhood (cf. Schalin 2004, 204, who discusses the possibility that Thesleff would have been an outsider living in a cultural and linguistic area that was strange to her). The family moved to Helsinki in the middle of the 1880s, but they still had a summer house in Ruovesi parish, near the major industrial city of Tampere, located in inland Finland. Thesleff started school in Kuopio and finished it in the Swedish-speaking girls’ school *Fruentimmersskolan* in Helsinki. In Finland, she studied, for instance, in a private academy and in a drawing school. She also studied in Paris at the beginning of the 1890s. In 1894, she visited Florence for the first time. Ten years later, in 1904, she visited Munich, Germany (Sinisalo 2007).

It is of special linguistic and cultural interest that Thesleff, who, as pointed out above, was originally Swedish-speaking, spent a great deal of time in predominantly Finnish-speaking parts of Finland, especially during summers. In spite of her Helsinki background, Thesleff can therefore be considered a representative of the so-called Swedishness of inland Finland (for Swedish “speech islands” in Finland, see Lönnroth 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2014). According to Schalin (2004, 204), Thesleff’s knowledge of Finnish was limited. However, if we consider Thesleff as a representative of the “Swedishness of inland Finland,” where the contact between Finnish and Swedish is closer than on the coast, at least theoretically, it would be natural if she knew more Finnish.³

AIM AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The aim of this paper is to discuss multilingualism in Thesleff’s correspondence to Craig during the first half of the twentieth century—in other words, the

3 An example of Finnish in the material is the proper name *Kissa* ‘cat’ (cf. the Swedish *kisse*). Swedish is visible in the material in terms of place names (e.g., *Tammerfors* ‘Tampere’) and other names (e.g., *Akademiska bokhandeln* ‘The Academic Bookstore’). Thesleff has also sent some press cuttings in Swedish to Craig. This indicates that Craig may have known some Swedish, but Thesleff may also have sent the cuttings to Craig out of pure interest.

coexistence of many languages in a multilingual correspondence from the point of view of historical sociolinguistics and multilingualism. The multilingual resources, which here refer especially to the phenomena of language choice and code-switching in writing, are of particular interest in the paper. In addition to these phenomena, the paper also aims at describing the linguistic profile of one European female artist and polyglot, Ellen Thesleff, the sender of the letters. Indirectly, the paper will also touch upon the languages of art and cultural discussion in early twentieth-century Europe.

Code-switching as a phenomenon is a common discourse strategy in bilingual and multilingual communities (Pahta and Nurmi 2007, 404). It is not only a phenomenon of spoken language but also of written language. With a focus on written texts, it is possible to get some additional information about the contacts between languages during different historical periods (Kalliokoski 2009, 13–14).

The term *code-switching* refers traditionally to 1) the switches between varieties of the same language, and to 2) switches between different languages. The contact between two or more registers of language in the same language-use situation is of importance. Language contact is a phenomenon that can be studied on the levels of language system, community, and the individual (Kalliokoski 2009, 13, 19).

This paper is inspired by studies by Päivi Pahta and Arja Nurmi, especially their on-going research into multilingualism and code-switching in the history of written English. They have, among other things, written about the structures of code-switching in eighteenth-century personal letters (Pahta and Nurmi 2007) and code-switching practices in Charles Burney’s correspondence (Pahta and Nurmi 2009). Their joint publications also include papers on social stratification and patterns of code-switching in Early English letters (Nurmi and Pahta 2004) and multilingual practices in women’s English correspondence during the period 1400 to 1800 (Nurmi and Pahta 2012).

According to Pahta and Nurmi (2007, 403), *code-switching* is a term that is used variously by many researchers and in the literature on language-contact phenomena. In line with their usage, the term is used here as an umbrella term (Pahta and Nurmi 2007, 404). Pahta and Nurmi (2007, 404) point out that it can be used “for any definable changes from one language to another within a single communicative episode, in this case a single letter.” However, in the same connection they also emphasize the difficulty, or as they put it, “the virtual impossibility,” of knowing the distinction between code-switching and borrowing (Pahta and Nurmi 2007, 404;

cf. also Kalliokoski 2009, 15).⁴ They mention that earlier studies focusing on historical texts have shown that code-switching as a phenomenon can be studied on two levels of linguistic structure: 1) the macrolevel of text or discourse structure, and 2) the microlevel of grammatical structure (2007, 407–8). Pahta and Nurmi’s studies show, among other things, that English eighteenth-century letters “quite frequently” contain embedded foreign language segments, both from the languages of classical education like Latin or the languages used in contemporary western Europe like French (Pahta and Nurmi 2007, 415).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The correspondence under scrutiny in this paper belongs to the Edward Gordon Craig collection at the National Library of France, *Bibliothèque nationale de France*. As pointed out above, the collection includes about 260 dated and undated letters from Thesleff to Craig. Most of the letters are written in German. In addition to German, the letters also contain the occasional use of French, Italian, and English, among other languages. The microfilm for the material (identification number R 83441) contains over 300 images, with two pages per image. Given the importance of research ethics connected with the study of personal letters, the National Library of France cannot deliver any reproduction of the material from the Edward Gordon Craig collection unless one has obtained a formal authorization from the Edward Gordon Craig Estate (email from Patrick Le Boeuf, National Library of France, November 27, 2006). A formal authorization for this study was received via email (email from Marie J. Taylor, executor at the Edward Gordon Craig Estate, December 15, 2006).

In this connection it is crucial to emphasize that I have not seen the original documents in Paris, only the ones reproduced on microfilm, and that I have studied a part of the letters in the microfilm. These methodological choices have, of course, an impact on the representation of this study. The postcards in the collection have been excluded from the analysis, and the selection of letters is limited to twenty-five (about 10 percent of the entire material). The aim has been to choose letters that are of general interest and representative of the material based on how much code-switching they include. The method of analysis is a qualitative close reading of the archival documents, and the examples presented in this paper have been transcribed by me.

⁴ However, it is possible to operationalize the distinction (see Halmari 1997).

Both language choice and code-switching in writing are phenomena that tell us a great deal about the textual dynamics of personal letters, where first person discourse is used quite frequently. The microfilm that belongs to the Edward Gordon Craig collection also contains other linguistically interesting material. There are, among other things, press cuttings in Swedish and letters from the Thesleff family to Craig (in German and English). These, however, are left for future research to tackle.

ON THE DYNAMICS OF MULTILINGUALISM: THE CASE OF ELLEN THESLEFF

Ellen Thesleff's letters to Gordon Craig demonstrate a true dynamic multilingual interplay in writing. In this section, some observations on her use of different languages (language choice) and code-switching (switches between different languages) are illustrated. In their own way, the following examples shed light on the linguistic nature of the letters in question and on Thesleff as a multilingual letter writer.

According to art historian Monica Schalin, Thesleff was a polyglot who mixed many languages playfully, both in speech and in writing. Schalin (2004, 204) assumes that Thesleff's "linguistic exaggeration"—*språkliga excesser*, as she puts it—was probably inspired by her family background in the multilingual city of Viipuri, nowadays a part of Russia (cf. also Schalin 2004, 95). According to another art historian, Leena Ahtola-Moorhouse, Thesleff moved fluently between five languages, but she was not very particular about her spelling (cited in Schalin 2004, 95). However, it does not become apparent which the five languages are. The Finland-Swedish critic Erik Kruskopf has, according to Schalin (2004, 95), called Thesleff's language "*uttrycksfull rotvälska*" 'expressive dog Latin'.

Example 1 below contains a short letter from the early twentieth century. The letter is dated in Swedish for the day and the month, but the exact year is missing. In this highly multilingual letter Thesleff makes use of English, German, French, Italian, and Swedish. The content of the letter is mainly about a portrait to be published in a forthcoming book. She writes:

- (1) [. . .] Dear you[!] I muss send you this portrait de my mother that I think is veru [sic] god. Es soll in ein Buch gedrückt sein—ein Buch um die ganze famiglia Thesleff seit 1590. I hope you are well[.] My adress Murole via Tammerfors. Write when you no better to do. Your E. (10 June)

["Dear you! I **must** send you this portrait **of** my mother that I think is very **good**. It is to be published in a book—a book about the

whole Thesleff **family since** 1590. I hope you are well. My **address** Murole via **Tampere**. Write when you no better to do. Your E.”⁵

Thesleff starts the letter in English: “Dear you” (see also examples 3 and 6). The use of English can, of course, be explained by Craig’s first language. Often Thesleff finishes her letters in English, which is also the case in examples 2 and 3. The closeness of certain English and Swedish words explains the Swedish spellings of *god* ‘good’ and *adress* ‘address’ in the letter. However, the intention of the writer is probably English, not Swedish. Thus the first language of Thesleff has, to some extent, influenced her writing in English (see also examples 2 and 6). The use of the Swedish place name *Tammerfors* instead of the Finnish *Tampere* is also a sign of her Swedish-speaking background. Certainly, there may also have been an emotional dimension that explains her use of the Swedish place name.

On the basis of example 1, one could say that Thesleff’s command of English seems to be far from perfect, but she probably wants to try to write mostly in English because of the recipient’s first language. However, her command of German seems to be stronger—she has one fluent sentence in German—and she also expresses the most complex concepts, including the key content of the letter, in German, whereas English is used for more formulaic expressions (cf. phatic communion). In the example, the French preposition *de* ‘of’ and the German auxiliary verb *muss* (< *müssen* ‘must’) are interesting, as well as the Italian *famiglia* ‘family’; they are more likely reflections of a language play than of a weak command of the English language.

In example 2, from 1923, we find an example starting in English and ending in an interesting farewell phrase combining both Italian and English. The linguistic resources of the letter are English, German, Italian, and French. Thesleff writes:

(2) [. . .] Are you living o dear Robinson so am I most happy—soltanto I never see une ligne de votre main, so I have no idée von was zum Sie zu sagen. You are the stummet man du monde. Und doch. Ich habe so manchen Tage ein wort von Sie gewünscht—und warum. Robinson, un disegno prego! I must laught [sic] a little. It is winter und natale perhaps Sun über that vecchio Firenze. Chi lo sa. Ich habe une exposition in ein andere città nun—und warte für una telegramma ob ich habe money gemacht—komt nichts. Saluti saluti—Your E. (17 December 1923)

5 In the translations, the switches are indicated by bold.

[“Are you living oh dear Robinson so am I most happy—**only** I never see **a row from your hand**, so I have no **idea what to say to you**. You are the **dumbest man in the world**. **And still**. **I have so many days hoped for a word from you—and why**. Robinson, **one drawing please!** I must laugh a little. It is winter **and Christmas** perhaps sun **over** that **old Florence**. **Who knows? I have an** exhibition in **another town now—and wait for a telegram whether I have made** money—**nothing comes**. **Bye-bye—Your E.**”]

In example 2 above, the content of the letter is mainly about Thesleff’s longing for Craig, from whom she evidently has not heard in a long time (for the emotionally charged word “longing,” see example 3). That is why she—even twice—probably calls him “Robinson” (cf. the literary reference to *Robinson Crusoe*). In addition, she also mentions an exhibition, *une exposition*, in another town and her financial expectations for it (money is a topic mentioned also in the rest of the examples); in this respect, an artist speaks to a fellow artist. The naming of the “main language” of the letter is problematic, and sometimes the number of single words is not a sufficient criterion to decide this either. Here, the switches in the letter include English in the beginning and the end of the letter, and her German is, regardless of some grammatical shortcomings, quite fluent, too. The switches in Italian are probably used to evoke and refer to Florence, the city also mentioned explicitly in the text. Interestingly, the Swedish influence is visible in the superlative *the stummost man* with the Swedish *stum* ‘dumb’ (cf. *den stummaste mannen* ‘the dumbest man’).

The content of example 3 below, like many other examples in the material, gives a good picture of the contacts and the life that Ellen Thesleff—and Gordon Craig—had (e.g., discussion about art projects). The highly emotional letter, dated in Swedish, is, among other things, about literature and theater:

- (3) [. . .] Dear You! What is the matter? J’ai dis: “I will try zu vergessen Sie” und ich dachte Sie sollte schnell schreiben: um Gottes willen! Aber in vece, da komt nichts nichts niente. Das ist Sie: zu frieden ob Sie nichts höre von mich. Et moi I am longing (ich liebe so sehr diese “longing”) longing um was zu wissen um allas [sic] was ist Sie. Diese Bücher Sie nun finish. Um was ist es? Theater? I think auch Sie sind ein reicher man der sitzt mit ein possession, ein garden und Haus in Genova; und ein andere der soll gebaut sein i Paris. Ma splendido. Aber was ist Genova—puh. Wenn ich geld habe ich will kaufen ein in Firenze und ein villino in Forte

oder Napoli oder Siracusa. Wir wollen sehen. So gute nacht[.] I am sleeping. Your E. (Apollogatan 13. 12 March)

["Dear You! What is the matter? **I have said: 'I will try to forget you' and I thought that you should write soon: for God's sake! But instead, there comes nothing, nothing, nothing. This is you: satisfied if you do not hear anything from me. And me, I am longing (I love so much this 'longing'), longing to know about everything that is you. These books that you now finish. What is it about? Theater? I think that you are also a rich man who sits with a property, a garden and house in Genoa; and another that should be built in Paris. That is excellent. But what is Genoa—whew. When I have money, I will buy one in Florence and a small house in Forte or Naples or Syracuse. We will see. So good night. I am sleeping. Your E.**"]

In example 3, the French *j'ai dit* 'I have said' and the English-German quotation *I will try zu vergessen Sie* 'I will try to forget you', that follows it, is fascinating because they can be supposed to refer to an earlier letter or discussion between Thesleff and Craig. It seems that Thesleff has really looked forward to hearing from Craig (cf. also example 2). The repetition *nichts nichts niente*—'nothing, nothing, nothing'—first in German and then in Italian is a powerful example of this fact and mimics to a great extent a spoken interaction. Consider also example 4 below:

- (4) [. . .] Aber was ist das für new speech: "Das es konnte nicht mich interessieren zu lesen etwas about You".? Das hat mich immer plaisir gemacht. Die erste mal ich saw you bei Cencio à Florence ich dachte you mit your Wistler was etwas für mich!! Ja ich glaube nun Sie sind povero—aber nur für ein Monath—und so komt Geld enormement. So für diese mal I will put stamp on diese letter and go away with it—Saluti distinti E.

["**But what is this for new speech: 'That it would not interest me to read something about you'? It has always been my pleasure. The first time I saw you by Cencio in Florence I thought you with your Wistler were something for me!! Yes, I believe now that you are poor—but only for a month—and so it comes enormously**

money. So for this time I will put stamp on **this** letter and go away with it—**Best regards E.**”]

In example 4, there is also a quotation with quotation marks in the letter (cf. example 3). The linguistic expression in German and English (*Das es konnte nicht mich interessieren zu lesen etwas about You* ‘That it would not interest me to read something about you’) is probably taken from a letter from Craig. The meaning of this quotation is problematic. One way of reading it might lead to an understanding that Craig wrote to Thesleff that she might not be interested in reading about him. However, without seeing the other side of the correspondence, it is quite difficult to speculate. Also the expression “new speech,” spelled incorrectly *new speech*, may originate from a letter by Craig. Another interesting spelling is *Monath*, which, however, is clearly a mixed spelling with German ‘Monat’ and English ‘month’.

Example 5 below, an extract from a letter, starts in English and contains a relatively long embedded sequence in French. The example is interesting because it includes a linguistic meta-comment, a phenomenon which is quite uncommon in the material: Thesleff comments—in fact, in German—on her language skills in French and German: *Nein ich habe ganz vergessen wie man französisch schreiben soll—deutsch kan ich auch nicht* ‘No, I have totally forgotten how to write French—I do not know German either’:

- (5) You—quelques mot pour vous dire que maintenant je sais pourquoi vous n’avez pas en mes lettres. À la porte aujourd’hui on m’a dit que depuis le mois de novembre la taxe coute un mark de plus—et je ne l’ai pas sut! Peutêtre quelques une de mes lettres arrivées vous a couté assez chères? Per bacco. Nein ich habe ganz vergessen wie man französisch schreiben soll—deutsch kan ich auch nicht—was soll man thun.— [. . .]

["You—a few words to explain that I know now why you do not have [a missing word] in my letters. At the door I was told today that from November onward the tax is one mark more—and I did not know that! Perhaps some of my letters that have arrived have cost you quite a lot? My word. No, I have totally forgotten how to write French—I do not know German either—but what should you do. —"]

Is Thesleff right? Can she write competently in French? If the answer to the latter question is no, it may be of significance when she switches to German, her stronger foreign language. It seems, however, that her French is comprehensible and for the most part even fluent, although grammatically a bit incomplete.⁶ Her German does appear to be mostly quite fluent. In this respect, she diminishes her own language skills when she writes that she does “not know German either” (cf., however, the spelling *thun* instead of *tun* ‘to do’).

Finally, example 6 below contains the most part of a letter from 1913. The main language here is German. However, the example contains also English (*Dear you, fonny* ‘funny’) and Italian (*primavera* ‘spring’, *Italia* ‘Italy’, and *arrivederci* ‘good-bye’). Actually, what is interesting in this connection is the use of Swedish: *skål* ‘cheers’ and *Herre gud* ‘oh my God’ (in this case it is not a question of linguistic error, cf. example 1). Both are emphatic expressions that are probably understandable by a person with no or little command of Swedish:

- (6) [. . .] Dearyou [*sic*] [. . .] It is mein grösste succès! 3,000 mark zu reisen—ein stipendium das die haben mich gestern gegeben[,] ist es nicht fonny [*sic*]? Ich lache! Nun ich glaube ich bin ein Fögel. Vielleicht ich reise in primavera[,] vielleicht in Herbst—weiss nicht. Ein monath in Paris—I think—sieben monath in Italia—I think—Sie sagen skål und Herre gud und arrivederci [. . .]. (23 November 1913.)

["Dear you! It is **my greatest success!** 3.000 **marks for traveling—a grant that they have given me yesterday.** Isn't it funny? **I laugh!** Now **I think I am a bird.** Maybe I will travel in **spring, maybe in fall—don't know.** **One month** in Paris—I think—**seven months** in **Italy**—I think—you say **cheers and oh my God and goodbye** [. . .]"

In example 6, Thesleff explains everything that is a bit more complicated in German, and these passages require more elaborate vocabulary. However, her use of the other two languages in the letter, English and Italian, are more sporadic and also formulaic. The English construction *I think*, which is used also in German (*ich glaube*) earlier, is interesting because it is embedded twice to emphasize the

6 I would like to thank Pieta Turkka, University of Vaasa, for translating and commenting on the French passage for me.

uncertainty Thesleff expresses in the letter (cf. also *vielleicht* ‘maybe’ and *weiss nicht* ‘don’t know’, both in German).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The focus of this paper has been on the linguistic profile of a Finnish artist and polyglot, Ellen Thesleff. The paper shows that Thesleff was a multilingual person who used different languages in her letters with great creativity. However, it is important to bear in mind that Thesleff was linguistically and culturally privileged; her social background enabled, to a considerable extent, her artistic pursuits, including languages, literature, and other cultural capital (see Sarajas-Korte 1998, 36, for the literature that the Thesleff family read). The letters bear witness to Thesleff’s basic command of many foreign languages. In other words, the case of Ellen Thesleff must be seen against the background of Finnish society and the tradition of the connections that artists had with their European colleagues, for example, in Paris at the turn of the nineteenth century (e.g., Albert Edelfelt, Ville Vallgren, Maria Wiik, Pekka Halonen, and Magnus Enckell). In this connection, it is also important to recall that plurilingual circles were typical of artistic life during the period in focus here. Art has always been international and cosmopolitan, and this was also the case with Thesleff and Craig.

In his paper on the mystery of the relationship between Thesleff and Craig, the Finnish art historian Markku Lahti (1976, 52) has pointed out that their relationship was both intimate and warm.⁷ His conclusion is based on the letters and postcards that Thesleff sent to Craig in the 1920s and 1930s. What is especially interesting here is that the letters and postcards, according to Lahti (1976, 53), are written in a kind of secret writing, *ett slags hemlig skrift*, that indicates the mutual respect the two artists had for each other’s art. This observation is interesting also for the discussion of the communicative function of the multilingual Thesleff–Craig correspondence. The languages of this correspondence tell us in part about the personal relationship between the two artists, a kind of language play that evokes the memories of their meetings in the Continent. The natural and quite fluent, imperceptible use of many languages is a rich stylistic resource; one could argue that this special language use was “their thing,” intended for their eyes only. Thesleff would hardly have written in the same way to a person she did not know as closely; with Craig, she could

7 To put the mystery of the relationship between Thesleff and Craig in perspective, it can be noted that while Thesleff lived and died single and had no children, Craig was not only married with many children but also had multiple lovers and children with them.

talk about art with enthusiasm, and this enthusiasm is also tangible in the letters. Furthermore, this raises the question of how much she tried to impress Craig with her wit and intelligence, reflected by her command of multiple languages.

The data in focus in this paper contain evidence of functional multilingualism (cf. Pahta and Nurmi 2007, 405). Thesleff, a native speaker of Swedish, was a multi-literate person. She was a person who to varying degrees was fluent in many foreign languages. In the Finnish context of the time, languages like English, German, and French were, of course, foreign languages, which were not known by everybody.

There are many problems that remain to be solved for future research. The following questions are speculative yet worth discussing in brief. First, did Thesleff use code-switching as a linguistic strategy because she lacked a particular word or phrase in her vocabulary? If the answer is yes, why did she not use circumlocutions, for example? Second, did Craig understand Thesleff's use of foreign words and phrases (cf. the question of language skills and education)? If not, the material would surely contain some meta-linguistic comments on that matter (consider, however, that the selection of letters here is limited). The answers to these questions are problematic because the letters written by Craig to Thesleff are not examined here, although there are some letters from Craig to Thesleff in Paris. In the future, it would therefore be interesting to look at these letters too in order to address the questions that are now left unanswered. Were Craig's letters as multilingual as Thesleff's? Judging from the quotations from Craig's letters that Thesleff comments on in her own letters, the main language of Craig's letters was English, which, of course, is to be expected as English was his first language (see also the image of a letter from Craig to Thesleff in Ahtola-Moorhouse 1998, 124, which is *in extenso* in English). Unfortunately, there are not many linguistic meta-comments in the chosen material to shed light on this matter. But what is essential is not whether Thesleff knew some words or not; what is important is that she produced letters in which many European languages are present, in active use. The final outcome, the personal letter, is therefore a highly multilingual, unique ego-document from the first half of the twentieth century.

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